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ABSTRACT

A cultural conflict occurs between the Mexican-American child and the Anglo teacher within the classroom situation. Punishment for adherence to his own culture results in loss of identity for the Mexican-American child and increases his tendency toward what may be termed deviant behavior. The more weighted the school curriculum is toward the middle-class Anglo expectations, the more difficult it will be for the Mexican-American child to participate. Teachers and school personnel must accept and appreciate the significant contributions that other languages and cultures have made and can make toward enriching the American way of life. A positive atmosphere toward the Mexican-American must be established and the cultural gap must be bridged; total acceptance of the validity of another culture is what should and must be the end goal. (VM)

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CULTURAL CONFLICT IN THE CLASSROOM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A paper presented by Marta Espinoza
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I will be addressing myself to the cultural conflict which occurs between the Mexican American child and the Anglo teacher. The reactions which occur and under what conditions they occur, to whom they occur and with what consequences. These will be the problem areas which I will try to probe and explain.

The Mexican American child presently in our schools suffers from a form of alienation in the Anglo classroom. The so called melting pot hypothesis which was supposed to take care of the problem has not worked.

The Mexican American child in the American school has in the past been punished for his adherance to his culture and the Spanish language in class and on the playground. It was not until very recently with the advent of pioneer Bilingual Education programs developed in Texas and throughout the Southwest that some positive recognition and value has begun to be given to the culture and language of the Mexican American child.

Anomie a term that deals with the loss of self-identity is presently being recognized as the reason for what may be termed as deviant behavior in the Mexican American child, unless wide-spread recognition of the possible consequences involved in the development of loss of self-identity is taken into account the Anglo-oriented school system in which the child is necessarily forced to participate, will continue to fail in its efforts to Americanize the Mexican American child.

This is not to say that all children of Mexican American descent will fail in the Anglo-oriented American School system. Some will succeed but at what cost?

But it is intended to point out that perhaps one of the reasons why the Mexican American child holds the dubious record of having the highest percentage of drop-outs in the largest minority in the Southwest; is that insufficient attention has been paid to the feelings of alienation that the Mexican American child encounters in our present school situation. It is for this reason that I shall attempt to describe in further detail the concept of anomie, what it is and its implications in reference to the so called deviant behavior which is encountered in the child of Mexican American descent who becomes a drop-out.

The forces working against the Mexican American child in the Anglo-oriented school with the Anglo teacher or even the Mexican American teacher who has been trained through the exact same educational system in the American Society, are the same forces responsible for the maintenance of the afore mentioned condition in the Mexican American child. Obviously the longer the time the child is in this condition of anomie, the longer it will take for him to find his pecking order so to speak and to get down to the business of learning.

The school curriculum, the teachers attitude, and as a matter of fact, the complete environment in which the child finds himself and with which he must interact are in the last analysis responsible for the length of time the child will remain in this condition.

Teacher attitude toward the culture and the language of the Mexican American child have a significant effect on the rapidity with which the child will begin to respond, in an acceptable manner to the school situation. (The child coming from a different background than that of the teachers and of his more prestigeous and acceptable Anglo peers must somehow ascertain the role that he concieves of as the most acceptable for that particular situation).

A definition of anomie which might be helpful in the understanding of the above paragraph; a quote from Solomon Korbin; "In lower-class areas, delinquent and conformity values exist side by side. Delinquent behavior is seen as a hostile response to negative evaluations by the represntatives of conformity values (e.g. the school). Such negative evaluations are meaningful to the delinquent because he has partially internalized the conformity values upon which they are based."

As can readily be seen the more weighted the school curriculum is toward the middle-class Anglo expectations the more difficult it will be for the child to see himself as a relevant participant in this foreign situation.

The school and classroom climate that the teacher finds himself under is one of close scrutiny by his administrators. The teacher's ability is measured by the performance of his students. The teacher who is measured by the performance of his students, feels threatened by the Mexican American child. He (the teacher) is threatened because the image the teacher may have of the Mexican American child is that of a low achiever, a slow learner, apathtic and non-competitive.

Solomon Korbin, "The conflict of Values in Delinquency Areas", American Sociological Review,16, 653-61.

Sterotypic conceptions of what a Mexican American child is and what the Mexican American people are, such as described by Celia Heller and Evelyn Bauer, must of necessity be destroyed to the point that no longer will the teacher preparation institutions permit misinformed, misguided, unenlightened so called professional teachers to assume that they know what a Mexican American child is and how he functions and how best to deal with them.

To fail to do this will be to fail the Mexican American child in the schools and to fail to know this is to continue reinforcement of some of the causes of deviant behavior and to perpetuate the drop-out statistics which have for so long been the cause of the Mexican American child in the Southwest.

According to Thomas Carter; "The cultural characteristics regularly ascribed to Mexican American children correspond all too often to the rather clearly defined and widely accepted Southwestern stereotype of "Mexicans" in general. "Mexicans" are categorized as being lackadisical, individualistic (non-cooperative), self-satisfied with their subordinate role, lazy, and imbued generally with a manana attitude (as exemplified by the Mexican sleeping against the Sahuaro). Much of the information available to teachers supports this stereotype, thus adding a measure of "scientific" verification to their ideas.

The solution to this immense problem is of such proportions that it will require a lenghty, costly but necessary process of re-education in the institutions which prepare administrators, teachers and school personnel. It will not come over night, it will not be easy but at least a start can be made in the right direction. Re-education in appreciation of another culture, appreciation for bi-lingual ability, language, tolerance of another culture.

Thomas Carter, Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect, College Enterance Examination Board, New York: 1970

But more than tolerance is necessary, it is of the utmost importance that appreciation and full acceptance of the significant contributions that other languages and cultures have made and can make towards the enrichment of our American way of life be given proper validity. We cannot expect the young Mexican American to come to school equipped with middle-class attitudes, from a middle-class environment or with middle-class preparation for school, but we can expect him to come with very definite talents and contributions. We must be sensitized to appreciate those cultural contributions, from his culture and from his language. Whether that culture be Mexican, Mexican American, Spanish, or Chicano. Whether that attitude be Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano. Whether that language be standard Spanish, Mexican American Spanish, or pocho Spanish.

But it <u>is</u> reasonable to expect that our teacher preparation institutions most especially those in the Southwest which contains a population of 4-5 million Mexican Americans to recognize the problem of the Mexican American child. Who according to all research is continuing to fail in the American school system in exceedingly disproportionate numbers.

In his presentation to the fourth annual convention of teachers of English to Speakers of other languages, 1970 Thiodore Andersson warned that the success of bilingual schooling is in danger unless reasonable quality is soon achieved. Hopeful signs, however, maybe detected in the insistance of the U.S. Office of Education on accountability. Public accountability, explained Andersson, stresses the idea of defining objectives in performance terms and measurably performance. It includes the requirement of an educational audit at the end of a contract year.

There is yet the most important obstacle to be overcome which Dr. Theodore Andersson did not address himself to; and that obstacle deals with the level of emotional committment on the part of all concerned in the implementation of any future title VII programs. This is for the establishment of a positive attitude towards the world, the universe of the Mexican American child as he precieves his school environment. The type of committment that I am addressing myself to is one that could best be described as a gut-level committment from school employees that contribute to a title VII program, which establishes the school environment in which the Mexican American child grows.

A positive atmosphere towards a Mexican American must be established before implementation of a title VII program. This "positiveness" must be instilled among all-- of the school personnel who will of necessity be involved in the program. The communication gap must also be closed between the school, the child and all that this would entail--his parents, his culture, etc.

The cultural gap is another very important area and I cannot stress the importance of it enough. The cultural gap must be bridged by the school personnel on a higher plane, rather than at the level of mere tolerance--total acceptance of the validity of another culture is what should/must be the end-goal.

From all that I've said and implied the end-product will be a child who can function both bilingually and biculturally to his full capacity "then" as Dr. Joshua Fishman stated "will the remaining hurdles soon fall away, and the millennium arrive in our own day".

Paper read by Prof. R. Cosper Yeshiva University, for Joshua Fishman at 1970 TESOL conference, San Francisco, California